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SUBJECT: COR MEMBERS ALLEGE DISPLACEMENT CONTINUES

REF: (A) BAGHDAD 768 (B) BAGHDAD 773

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for
reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Shia Council of Representatives (CoR) members report more displacements of Shia families under threat of violence. Shia Coalition member Hassan Radi al-Sari (Missan Governorate) and Iraqiyya List member Shaykh Jamal Abd al-Mehdi al-Shemari (Wasit Governorate) told PolOffs March 16 and March 26 respectively that Shia families have fled their homes in Baghdad or Sunni-majority governorates and are arriving in their governorates. Poloffs have received similar complaints about displacement of Sunni Arab and Christian families in Baghdad and Basra. The issue has sustained its high media profile throughout the month of March. END SUMMARY

DISPLACED SHIA FAMILIES ARRIVING IN MISSAN AND WASIT

12. (C) Shia Coalition and CoR member Hassan Radi al-Sari (Missan Governorate) told PolOffs March 16 that displaced Shia families have arrived in Missan from Anbar, Samarra, and Abu Gharaib. PolOffs asked if any families had come from Baghdad, and he answered no. He estimated the number of displaced families at 270 in Maysan. He said these people were from families that had left Missan in the 1950's and 1960's. He said the arrival of these people was driving up local real estate prices.

13. (C) Al-Sari told PolOffs that, before these families left, they had faced increasing levels of threats: first threatening letters, then harassment, then killings, and finally a firm deadline to move out of their houses (without taking anything). He stated that the Sunni Arab neighbors have reportedly been passive and silent when these actions occur. He alleged that the perpetrators were Iraqis and not foreign terrorists.

14. (C) Iraqiyya List and CoR member Shaykh Jamal Abd al-Mehdi al-Shemari (Wasit Governorate) told PolOff March 26 that an estimated 300 displaced Shia families had arrived in Wasit to date from Abu Gharaib and the Baghdad neighborhoods of Saydiyah and Amiriyah. He added that the arrival of these displaced Shia families is making it more difficult to protect Sunni families living in Wasit. He said most of the displaced families are staying with relatives. He stated that some left because of the perceived threat and others because of direct threats. He alleged that the insurgents are trying to divide Baghdad - Karkh District for the Sunnis and Rusafa District for the Shia.

COMMENT

15. (C) Throughout the month of March we have heard complaints about expulsions of Shia families. Senior SCIRI cleric Sheikh Jalal al-Din al-Sagheer, in a March 16 conversation with Poloff, claimed that Minister of Defense Dulaymi confirmed to him after the COR ceremony that 940 Shia families had been forcibly displaced from the Taji and Naruwhan suburbs of Baghdad. Another SCIRI parliamentarian, Zayna al-Gerairi, told us in the same meeting that in Baqubah and the surrounding villages, many Shia are being killed everyday. Those being killed have no political agendas, she claimed, and the killings appeared to be completely random. Prompted by al-Sagheer, al-Gerairi added that families were also being displaced in that section of Diyala province. Meanwhile, senior Sunni Arab leaders have for the last several weeks been making similar claims to EmbassyOffs about forcible displacements and killings of Sunni Arab families by Shia militia and Ministry of Interior police and commandos. Reporting by NGO's and the Human Rights Ministry (reftels) indicates that Shia (and Sunni) families moving out of mixed neighborhoods back to their places of origins (or where their families are located). TV stations like pro-SCIRI al-Furat and Shia Islamist al-Iraqiya have carried prominent prime-time stories this week of the woes of displaced families, maintaining the issue's high profile.
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